

Engaging our Culture as Christians – *Real Freedom*

Led by Josh (Nov 7, 2002) – Biblical quotes from *New Jerusalem Bible*

Perhaps you've pondered how, as Christians, we can conform to God's will and be free? To some people it may seem that not caring about vice or virtue is real freedom, being able to do *whatever* you want. However, as Christians we seek to know our Creator better, and show love to Him in all we do. Doesn't this seriously limit our creativity, or does it give us *real freedom* to actually be creative. Is it about following rules and regulations or being able to live life more fully through truth?

What is freedom? (Take no more than 15 minutes to do this part.)

Merriem-Webster On-line Dictionary – “**1** : the quality or state of being free: as **a** : the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action **b** : liberation from slavery or restraint or from the power of another : independence **c** : the quality or state of being exempt or released usually from something onerous <freedom from care> **d** : ease, facility <spoke the language with freedom> **e** : the quality of being frank, open, or outspoken <answered with freedom> **f** : improper familiarity **g** : boldness of conception or execution **h** : unrestricted use <gave him the freedom of their home>

- What do you think about definition **1a**? What instance in reality is *fully* absent of necessity, coercion, or constraint? Can someone choose to ignore necessity, coercion, or constraint and still (attempt to) perform a deed?
- How does **1a** compare to **1b** and **1c**? Would these two fall under the necessity, coercion and/or constraint releases in freedom?
- How does **1a** compare to **1d** through **1g**? Would these four fall under the necessity, coercion and/or constraint releases in freedom?

What type of bondage might we be under? (Take ~30 minutes for this part.)

Rom 6:12-19 – “That is why you must not allow sin to reign over your mortal bodies and make you obey their desires; or give any parts of your bodies over to sin to be used as instruments of evil. Instead, give yourselves to God, as people brought to life from the dead, and give every part of your bodies to God to be instruments of uprightness; and then sin will no longer have any power over you, you are living not under law, but under grace. What is the implication? That we are free to sin, now that we are not under law but under grace? Out of the question! You know well that if you undertake to be somebody's slave and obey him, you are the slave of him you obey: you can be the slave either of sin which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to saving justice. Once you were slaves of sin, but thank God you have given whole-hearted obedience to the pattern of teaching to which you were introduced; and so, being freed from serving sin, you took uprightness as your master. I am putting it in human terms because you are still weak human beings: as once you surrendered yourselves as servants to immorality and to a lawlessness which results in more lawlessness, now you have to surrender yourselves to uprightness which is to result in sanctification.”

1 Cor 7:20-24 – “... Everyone should stay in whatever state he was in when he was called. So, if when you were called, you were a slave, do not think it matters, even if you have a chance of freedom, you should prefer to make full use of your condition as a slave. You see, anyone who was called in the Lord while a slave, is a freeman of the Lord; and in the same way, anyone who was free when called, is a slave of Christ. You have been bought at a price; do not be slaves now to any human being. Each one of you, brothers, is to stay before God in the state in which you were called.”

Gal 5:13-21 – “After all, brothers, you were called to be free; do not use your freedom as an opening for self-indulgence, but to be servants to one another in love, since the whole of the Law is summarized in the one commandment: You must love your neighbor as yourself. If you go snapping at one another and tearing one another to pieces, take care: you will be eaten up by one another. Instead, I tell you, be guided by the Spirit, and you will no longer yield to self-indulgence. The desires of self-indulgence are always in opposition to the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are in opposition to self-indulgence: they are opposites, one against the other; that is how you are prevented from doing the things that you want to. But when you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. When self-indulgence is at work the results are obvious: sexual vice, impurity, and sensuality, the worship of false gods and sorcery; antagonisms and rivalry, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions and malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things. And about these, I tell you now as I have told you in the past, that people who behave in these ways will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Proverbs 11:29 – “Whoever misgoverns a house inherits the wind, and the fool becomes slave to the wise.”

Proverbs 29:22 – “The hot-head provokes disputes, someone in a rage commits all sorts of sins.”

2 Th 2:11 – “But the coming of the wicked One will be marked by Satan being at work in all kinds of counterfeit miracles and signs and wonders, and every wicked deception aimed at those who are on the way to destruction because they would not accept the love of the truth and so be saved. And therefore God sends on them a power that deludes people so that they believe what is false, and so that those who do not believe the truth and take their pleasure in wickedness may all be condemned.”

John 8:31-36 – “To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free. They answered, ‘We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, ‘You will be set free?’” Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now a slave has no permanent standing in the household, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.”

- What types of bondages are described above?
- How does each bondage reduce freedom? For each bondage list how they might be caused be either necessity, coercion, or constraint.
- Why might freedom from control by these be desirable?

What does Christian freedom look like? (Take ~40 minutes for this part.)

1 Cor 10:23-33 – “ ‘Everything is permissible’; maybe so, but not everything does good.

True, everything is permissible, but not everything builds people up. Nobody should be looking for selfish advantage, but everybody for someone else’s. Eat anything that is sold in butcher’s shops; there is no need to ask questions for conscience’s sake, since to the Lord belong the earth and all it contains. If an unbeliever invites you to a meal, go if you want to, and eat whatever is put before you; you need not ask questions of conscience first. But if someone says to you, ‘This food has been offered in sacrifice,’ do not eat it, out of consideration for the person that told you, for conscience’s sake, not your own conscience, I mean, but the other person’s. Why should my freedom be governed by somebody else’s conscience? Provided that I accept it with gratitude, why should I be blamed for eating food for which I give thanks? Whatever you eat, then, or drink, and whatever else you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Eph 1:5-8 – “... Such was his purpose and good pleasure, to the praise of the glory of his grace, his free gift to us in the Beloved, in whom, through his blood, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins. Such is the richness of the grace which he has showered on us in all wisdom and insight.

Philip 1:21-26 – “Life to me, of course, is Christ, but then death would be a positive gain. On the other hand again, if to be alive in the body gives me an opportunity for fruitful work, I do not know which I should choose. I am caught in this dilemma: I want to be gone and to be with Christ, and this is by far the stronger desire, and yet for your sake to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need. This much I know for certain, that I shall stay and stand by you all, to encourage your advance and your joy in the faith, so that my return to be among you may increase to overflowing your pride in Jesus Christ on my account.”

Col 1:13-14 – “Because that is what he has done. It is he who has rescued us from the ruling force of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that he loves, and in him we enjoy our freedom, the forgiveness of sin.”

James 1:22-25 – “But you must do what the Word tells you and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves. Anyone who listens to the Word and takes no action is like someone who looks at his own features in a mirror and, once he has seen what he looks like, goes off and immediately forgets it. But anyone who looks steadily at the perfect law of freedom and keeps to it, not listening and forgetting, but putting it into practice, will be blessed in every undertaking.

James 2:8-13 – “Well, the right thing to do is to keep the supreme Law of scripture: you will love your neighbor as yourself; but as soon as you make class distinctions, you are committing sin and under condemnation for breaking the Law. You see, anyone who keeps the whole of the Law but trips up on a single point, is still guilty of breaking it all. He who said, ‘You must not commit adultery’ said also, ‘You must not kill.’ Now if you commit murder, you need not commit adultery as well to become a breaker of the Law. Talk and behave like people who are going to be judged by the law of freedom. Whoever acts without mercy will be judged without mercy but mercy can afford to laugh at judgment.”

Psalms 119:41-48 – “Let your faithful love come to me, Yahweh, true to your promise, save me! Give me an answer to the taunts against me, since I rely on your word.

Do not deprive me of that faithful word, since my hope lies in your judgments. I shall keep your Law without fail for ever and ever. I shall live in all freedom because I have sought your precepts. I shall speak of your instructions before kings

The Truth of Catholicism by George Weigel, pgs.78-79 –

The great nineteenth-century English historian of freedom, Lord Acton, had a dramatically different point of view. Freedom, Acton insisted, is not the power to do whatever we like. Instead, freedom is having the right to do what we ought. Freedom and goodness are intimately, inextricably related.

We can begin to get an idea of what Acton meant, and how it leads us to a richer, more human concept of freedom, by thinking about two ways in which we develop as human beings: playing a musical instrument and learning a new language. Learning to play the piano can be a tedious business, involving disciplined exercises by which we train our minds and our fingers. At the beginning, every piano student experiences those exercises as a burden, a constraint. After a while, though, what we once experienced as constraining seems liberating. Mastering those exercises has equipped me to play anything I want, including the most difficult compositions. What seemed like drudgery has even equipped me to create new music on my own.

Anyone, of course, is free to pound away on a piano, making haphazard noise, but as an eminent moral theologian, Father Servais Pinckaers, notes, “This is a rudimentary, savage sort of freedom,” which “cloaks an incapacity to play even the simplest pieces accurately and well.” Those who have done their exercises have really mastered the art of playing the piano, and by becoming artists they have acquired a new freedom. This deeper, richer, more human freedom is a matter of gradually acquiring the capacity to do what we choose with perfection.

...

Father Pinckaers calls this “freedom for excellence,” and it stands in sharp contrast to freedom as my way, or freedom as willfulness. Doing it my way is like banging on the piano or speaking gibberish. Doing things the right way is doing things the human way, the truly free way. We are made for freedom, Father Pinckaers suggests. We are made for a freedom that is lived by developing the habits of the mind and heart—the virtues—that enable us to satisfy our natural attraction to happiness, our natural disposition toward the good. Every human being, Pinckaers writes, has “basic moral inclinations” and a “primal moral sense” that “no corruption ... can completely destroy.” To grow in the moral life is to develop our moral habits so that we know and do what is good almost as a matter of instinct. That is how we grow into the kind of people who can live with God, who is all goodness.

- God’s Word is Truth, so how does this affect freedom? Does it add necessity, coercion, or constraint? Does it enable us to be freer by allowing us to see options that were previously invisible to us?
- Are the rules God gives us like those of a teacher training a student to be better, or of a tyrant who only wants his own way? Which leads to doing something out of love rather than of necessity?
- Do we experience this freedom? Do others see this freedom in our lives?